

A  
Philosophical Amusement  
UPON THE  
LANGUAGE  
O F  
BEASTS.

Written originally in French by Father *Bougeant*,  
a famous Jesuit; Now confined at *La Fleche*  
on Account of this Work.



L O N D O N

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Written originally in French by M. de la Fontaine  
Translated by M. de la Fontaine



LONDON:  
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# Philosophical Amusement

UPON THE

## Language of BEASTS.

**H**OW insinuating you are, Madam, and how well you know the extent of your Power over me! I did but once drop a Word in one of our Philosophical Conversations, that I was of Opinion that Beasts spoke and very well understood each other. Any body but you would have look'd upon this as one of those Expressions which we are apt sometimes to throw out without Proofs, and with no other Design but that of invivening the Conversation. But you know me very well, you say, and though the Proposition looks very much like a piece of Pleasantry, you are pleased to say that I did not advance it at Random: nay, you will needs have me treat of it seriously, and give you an account of the Reasons that persuaded me to it. Though I have the utmost Desire to please you, I don't know whether I could in any other Circumstance prevail upon myself to obey you. For you know I have hardly any Leisure to bestow upon amusing Dissertations. By good Fortune I am at last got into the Country. I have left in Town the very Memory of the unpleasant Employments which make you sometimes pity me. Now methinks I am here the Sovereign of whole Nature: in a delightful Abode, among a Circle of Amusements whose Variety removes Disgust, and which I

share in common with a charming Set of Company. From this single Circumstance you easily will guess that I am at C\*\*\*. Our Masters in Voluptuousness say, that a means to sharpen the Edge of Pleasures is now and then to interrupt the Chain of them by some trifling Imployment. What better Choice can I then make than to satisfy your Curiosity? Self-love, you see, is at the bottom of all we do, and it will be much less Merit than Pleasure for me to obey your Commands. But we make Allowances to each other, and if you are but satisfied with my Performance, I have a Notion that you will easily forgive my not having therein altogether neglected my own Amusement.

You then ask me whether I in good earnest believe that Beasts speak? Why, Madam, I very seriously am of Opinion that Beasts do speak and understand each other every whit as well and sometimes better than we do. Now is your Curiosity satisfied? Not a Jot. You will needs know my Reasons for thinking so. If I was conversing with you, I would tell you that the Reason which persuades me that Beasts speak, is, that Mr. R. speaks: You would surely strengthen this Argument by the Instance of Mrs. H\*, and that Buffoonery perhaps would set us both o'laughing. But whoever writes must have a regard for his Readers. Nor shall I tell you that the Serpent had of old a long and coherent Conversation with *Eve*, and that *Balaam's* Ass spoke. It would be more needless still here to alledge the Fable of the Horses of *Achilles*. You would certainly reply, that of these Events some are Supernatural and the other Fabulous, and that they of course are no Argument in the Order of Nature. Now I understand you: I am to fetch the Proofs of

of my Opinion from Nature itself. Well, but don't you at the same time expect from me any wonderful Discoveries. You perhaps will be astonished to find that you already yourself believe every Circumstance of what I think on this Matter; and that I shall do nothing but unfold your own Thoughts to you, and let you into the Nature of intricate Sentiments which you have not sufficiently examined. But some Preliminaries must be previously established, and I am afraid the Accessory will not be shorter than the main Subject; which is a capital Fault, and against the Rules of exact Composition. But what of that, provided the whole amuses you! Have Beasts any Understanding? If they have, they speak. But how do they speak? These shall be the three Heads of this Dissertation.

## I.

*Of the Understanding of BEASTS.*

**H**A V E Brutes any Understanding? I am convinced you will not so much as hesitate upon an Answer to this Question. *Descartes* shall in vain tell you that Beasts are Machines: that all their Actions may be accounted for by the Laws of Mechanism: that before him, and even from the time of *St. Austin*, some Philosophers have had something like the same Notion. You have a Bitch which you love, and which you think yourself reciprocally loved by. Now I defy all the *Cartesians* in the World to persuade you that your Bitch is a meer Machine. Pray consider what a ridiculous Cast this Opinion would give all of us who love Horses, Dogs, and



Birds. Imagine to yourself a Man who should love his Watch as we love a Dog, and cares it because he should think himself dearly beloved by it, so as to think that when it points out Twelve or One o' Clock, it does it knowingly and out of Tenderness to him. Were *Descartes's* Opinion true, such would indeed be the Folly of all who believe that their Dogs have an Affection for them, and love them with Knowledge and what we call Sentiment.

I own that if the System of *Descartes* was supported by solid Proofs, the Consequence would not be sufficient to confute it : Men in this Case should be pitied for being given over to so gross an Illusion. But Truth is for ever Truth let our self-love suffer ever so much by it. By good luck the Opinion of this Philosopher has no other Foundation than bare Possibilities. God, says he, was able to make meer Machines of Beasts. He might have done it without any Impossibility. I can account for all their Actions by the Laws of Mechanism. Nay, there are even some of these Actions which seem to admit of no other Principle. *Ergo*, I have Reasons to think that Beasts are Machines. A very wrong way of Arguing as you see. For from matter of Fact to Possibility the Consequence is certain ; but from Possibility to matter of Fact the Consequence is rash, uncertain, and venturous. It is a meer Supposition, a Castle in the Air, which may serve for an Amusement, but has no manner of Solidity in it.

Nay more. There is something within us, which concurs with Reason to banish the *Cartesian* System from Society. It is not a bare Prejudice, but an inward Persuasion, a Sentiment whose Origin is this. Possibly the Men with whom I live, who speak to me, who give me Answers, who  
argue

argue and act together with me, may be nothing but meer Machines. For I know that I am actually thinking and have within me a thinking and knowing Principle. But I am not equally informed of what passes within other Men, and it cannot be denied but that God has the Power of making such Creatures as should have the Appearance only and Motions of Men, though they were at bottom nothing but Machines. However, notwithstanding the Truth of this Principle, it would be altogether impossible for me (unless God should expressly reveal it) to beat it into my Head, that the Men with whom I live are indeed nothing but Machines, made to assist or incumber, to please or torment me. And why so? It is because when I see any one speaking, reasoning, and acting as I myself do, I know not what Sentiment within me joins with Reason and Common Sense, to force me to believe that the Man whom I see has in him an active and knowing Principle altogether like my own. Now, Beasts are in the same Case with regard to us. I see a Dog hastening to me when I call him, caress me when I stroke him, tremble and run away when I rate him, obey me when I command him, and give all the outward Signs of many different Sentiments; of Joy and Sadness, of Grief and Pain, of Fear and Desire, of Passions, of Love and Hatred. I immediately conclude from thence, that a Dog has in him a Principle of Knowledge and Sentiment, be it what it will. Though I should Use my utmost Endeavour, to beat it into my Head that he is a meer Machine, and though all the Philosophers in the World should attempt to convince me of it, I feel myself hurried away by an inward Conviction, and by I know not what prevailing Force which

which persuades me to the contrary : And this Sentiment it is, which for ever will contradict the *Cartesian* Opinion in the Minds of Men. It is likely therefore that this Philosopher, whose Genius was so transcendent, espoused a System so very opposite to our Notions out of meer Frolick, and for no other purpose but to contradict the *Peripatetics*, to whom he was a professed Enemy, and whose System upon the Understanding of Beasts in reality is not to be maintained.

These Gentlemen who, according to the dark Principles of their unintelligible Philosophy, assigned to Bodies a substantial and material Form, distinct however from Matter, and which was in them the Principle of all their Actions, would not doubtless refuse to Beasts a Form of this Kind. On the other Hand, as they allowed that Beasts were indowed with Sentiment and Knowledge, and acted according to Knowledge and Sentiment ; they fain would have attributed to them a spiritual Soul like that of Man : But this the Principles of Christianity did not allow. And really if Beasts had a spiritual Soul, that Soul should then be immortal and free, it should be capable of meriting or of doing amiss, of Recompense or of Punishment : They should have a Paradise and a Hell appointed for them ; Beasts should be a Kind of Men, or Men a Kind of Beasts ; all which Consequences are unwarrantable by the Principles of Religion. The *Peripatetics*, thus obliged to be contented with their substantial-material Form, to avoid one Inconvenience fell into another, being of course obliged to say that this substantial Form was in Beasts the Principle of their Knowledge and Actions, the most absurd Sentiment according to the establish'd Principles of Philosophy and Religion. For in the established Philosophy we know only two Substances ;



stances; one thinking, having Sentiments, knowing, and reasoning, which is Spirit: The other extended, divisible, moveable, capable of occasioning Sentiments and Knowledge by its Union with Spirit, but altogether incapable itself of knowing and having Sentiments, which is Matter. Here we perceive at one View all the Contradictions necessarily flowing from the Opinion of the *Peripatetics*. A substantial Form, which is neither Spirit nor Matter: Something which has a knowing Faculty and yet is no Spirit: A substantial-material Form, which is no Matter; in short, material Sentiments and a material Knowledge. A very dangerous Principle! which might become a Weapon in the Hands of Unbelievers against the Spirituality of our Soul. Is it not a Wonder that so monstrous an Opinion should have so long kept its Ground in the Christian Schools?

Some Philosophers pretended to rectify it. Why, said they, should we acknowledge in the Universe only these two Substances, Spirit and Matter? Has not God been able to create a middle Substance, between one and the other, inferior to Spirit and superior to Matter, incapable of reasoning, but capable of Sentiment and Knowledge? One might indeed at first be apt to believe this, and you perhaps sooner than any. But, Madam, have a Care if you please. This would at once replunge you into the Uncertainty of the *Cartesian* Sentiment, and the Darkness of the *Peripatetic* Opinion. For 1. This System is a meer Supposition, void of Proof and destitute of Foundation. 2. What Notion can we frame to ourselves of a Substance which is neither Spirit nor Matter? With regard to us who know no other but these two Substances, a Middle one is a *Chimæra*, an *ens rationis*, which we have no Perception

tion nor any Notion of. And who knows but that which is a meer Chimæra with regard to us, is really so in Nature and in itself? If it is so in itself, God has not been able to create it, because he can make no *ens rationis*. Now who shall resolve so reasonable a Doubt?

An antient Author, whose Works are collated among those of the Fathers, *Firmianus Lactantius*, explained himself more frankly. He pretended that God had granted the Use of Reason to whatever breathes, but to Beasts for the Preservation of their Lives only, without any religious Duty; and to Men to enable them to acquire Immortality and an eternal Happiness, by the Practice of a religious Worship. What a Notion! To be sure *Firmianus* did not see, that supposing a reasonable and of course a spiritual Soul without any Duty of Religion, was undermining the Foundations of the Law of Nature and of all Religion, degrading the spiritual Soul, destroying the Immortality of its Nature, and bringing us down to the State of Beasts, in trying to advance these to our own.

You see I only touch upon Systems, for fear I should tire you by particular Arguments. However, this is all Philosophy teaches with regard to the Knowledge of Beasts. How narrow is the human Understanding, you will say, how short its Lights, how great its Obscurity! It is enough to fright one. We know we exist and think: We see Facts; we know the Existence of a thousand Things; but when we are asked how and why they are so; we then lose ourselves in an Abyss of frivolous Conjectures and false Suppositions: We confuse our own Brains with a thousand vain Arguments, which, far from enlightening our Minds, have generally no other effect than to smother

smother that little Portion of Light which Common-sense has imparted to us. We do not understand ourselves, how then can we understand the Nature of Beasts and of all without us?

Let me pray you to do one Thing. Go to the *Indies*, to *China* or *Japan*, and there you will find Philosophers of the Heathen, Deist, or Atheist Kind, who will argue if not with greater Capacity, at least with greater Freedom. One will tell you that God has created several Species of Spirits, some more perfect, such as the good and bad *Genii* are; some less perfect, which are Men, and others much more imperfect still, which are the Beasts. Another will tell you, that the Distinction of the Spirit and Matter is chimerical and impossible to be demonstrated; that he sees no Manner of Inconveniency in thinking that there is but one Substance which you may call by what Name you please; that this Substance has in Beasts as well as in Men an Organization, a Modification, a Motion, something in short which makes it think more or less perfectly: And these Gentlemen acknowledging neither the Principles of the Christian Religion nor the Authority of the Church; you will be under the Necessity (in order to attack them in their Retrenchments) either to begin by making them Christians, or to go back to metaphysical Principles very difficult to be unravelled. But I hope you will spare yourself the Trouble of the Voyage, and chuse, as I myself do, to stick close to this greatest of Principles, *viz.* All these Systems are contrary to the Christian Religion; of course they are absolutely false.

Be comforted, Madam, here is another Hypothesis, which has nothing common with any of those I just laid before you. It is a System in-



tirely new, which will divert you at least by its Singularity, and which I shall here repeat to you in the very Words of the Author himself, whom I heard producing it a while since in Company, and with an Air of Gravity mixed with Buffoonry, which made it doubtful whether he was himself perfectly persuaded of it.

Every Body, said he, agrees that Beasts have a knowing Faculty; they have then a Soul. But is that Soul Matter or Spirit? It must be one of the Two, and yet you dare affirm neither. You dare not advance that it is Matter, because you must necessarily suppose Matter to be capable of thinking. Nor will you say that it is a Spirit; this Opinion bringing with it Consequences contrary to the Principles of Religion. Well, said he, I shall now resolve all your Difficulties. Know then, that Beasts have a spiritual Soul like ours, and that this Opinion, far from contradicting the Principles of Religion, is altogether agreeable to it as well as to Reason. You easily judge that this Introduction ingrossed all our Attention. The whole Company smiled, perhaps maliciously, and our Impatience for knowing the new System occasioned a profound Silence. The Author went on.

Reason, said he, naturally inclines us to believe that Beasts have a spiritual Soul; and the only Thing which opposes this Sentiment is, the Consequences that might be inferred from it; and this, among others; that Men would differ from Beasts only by the Degrees of *Plus* and *Minus*; which would demolish the very Foundations of all Religion. Therefore, added he, if I can elude all these Consequences, - if I can assign to Beasts a spiritual Soul without striking at the Doctrines of Religion; it is evident that my System

stem being moreover the most agreeable to Reason, is the only warrantable Hypothesis. Now I can and shall do it with the greatest ease imaginable, I even have Means by the same Method to explain many very obscure Passages in the Holy Scripture, and to resolve some very great Difficulties which are not well confuted. This we shall unfold in a more particular Manner.

Religion teaches us that the Devils, from the very Moment they had sinned, were reprobate, and that they are doomed to burn forever in Hell. But the Church has not as yet determined whether they do actually indure the Torments to which they are condemned. It may then be thought that they do not as yet suffer them, and that the Execution of the Verdict brought against them, is reserved for the Day of the final Judgment. It is otherwise with the Souls of Men; the Church having determined that our Souls are judged the very Instant of their Separation from the Body, and that the Sentence is immediately executed; so that those who die in God's Displeasure, are that very Instant plunged into the Flames of Hell. But the Church has made no such Decision with regard to the Devils. 'Tis true, we very commonly fancy so, and a Multitude of People there are, into whose Minds it never came to call it in Question. But this Opinion, on account of its being believed rashly and without Examination (it being on the other Hand supported neither by Scripture nor by any other Decision) is not in the Church a Tradition to which one is obliged to submit; and the more so because my Sentiment is not altogether new, and I might mention some Authors who have given Hints of it; among others

an Ecclesiastical Writer, *Victor* Priest of *Antioch*, who has expressly published it in his Works.

Now, Madam, you must know, that while the Author was thus delivering himself, an Abbe and Doctor who was present, a Man of Wit indeed, but warm in Dispute and prejudiced in Favour of his own Opinions, was muttering and grumbling to himself, with an Air of discontent which our Author easily discovered. What is the matter with you, Sir, said he; you seem not to be pleased? No more I can be, replied the Doctor, for your Proposition is downright Herefy. This you are to prove replied the Author. Nothing in the World so easy said the Doctor; and I shall do it from the Authority of the Scholastick Authors, and the Holy Fathers. You shan't, by all that's good! Said the Lady whose House we were at; at least you shan't do it now. We are all of us curious to know the new System; you must if you please hear it from Beginning to End, and afterwards you shall be at Liberty to dispute as much as you please upon your Scholasticks, and your Holy Fathers. The Lady was obeyed, and the other went on.

When I advance, said he, that the Devils do not as yet suffer the Torments of Hell, if it was an arbitrary Supposition like the Mechanism of *Descartes*, or the middle Substance which some other Philosophers have imagined; every one would have a right to reject my Supposition, and I should persuade no body into it. But I beg the Doctor to be pleased to hear the Proofs whereupon my Proposition is supported. It is an Article of our Faith that the Devil tempts us in order to provoke us to Sin: That he lays Snares to make us fall: That he is for ever roving about us, as *St. Peter* has it, watching an Occasion to de-

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your us. He fills our Minds with wicked Suggestions: He seizes upon Bodies, and when he has once made himself Master of them, he does not always betray his Presence by Fits of Madness. He sometimes Laughs, he Sings, and delights in puzzling the Ministers of the Church who attempt to conjure him forth. He argues with the utmost Coolness, as when he tempted *Jesus Christ* in the Desert, and seduced *Eve* in the earthly Paradise. Now imagine to yourself some Body in Hell, such as Scripture represents it, penetrated through his whole Substance, devoured and consumed by a Fire, whose Violence is beyond every thing; and then consider if a Man or a Spirit in that Condition can possibly be taken up with any other Thought than that of the horrid Torture he endures. If you tell me that he is transported with Fury, and that all his Moments are constantly filled by new Fits of Rage and Despair, I shall necessarily conceive it. But that he should have leisure enough to think of tempting and shifting with us, is altogether incomprehensible, and we should be obliged to conclude that the Devils do not tempt us, or that the Tortures of Hell are not so very great as they are represented; two Consequences equally opposite to Faith. Let us then conclude, that the Devils do not as yet undergo their Torments.

What our Divines say that the Devils carry their Hell along with them every where, I know very well and confess, I even think it is not to be questioned. But let us explain ourselves. That it may be truly said that the Devils carry their Hell with them every where, is it necessary that they should actually undergo the Tortures of it? No. It is enough that they be condemned to it by an irrevocable Decree, of which they every where

where carry with them the Shame and primary Effects, as I shall immediately explain. Would we not say of a Criminal whose Punishment should be deferred in order to make him lead a miserable and ignominious Life for a few Days, that he carries every where with him the Wheel he is to expire on? Thus it is that the Devils carry their Hell with them every where. Their Sentence is pronounced without any hopes of Mercy; they are condemned without Remorse, they every where carry the eternal Blemish of it; the horrid Thought never leaves them, and consequently they every where carry their Hell along with them, that is, the Idea of the Hell for them appointed. But we have a thousand Reasons to believe that they do not as yet suffer the real Tortures of it?

And why should we not believe it, if the Holy Scripture says it expressly. Let the Doctor himself judge of it. When *Jesus Christ* beforehand pronounced Sentence on the Reprobate, what are his Words? *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting Fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels.* Math. xxv. 41. He says not that the Devil and his Angels actually burn in that Fire. He only says, that that Fire is *prepared* and waits for them at the last Day, which shall be the beginning of their Torments. This agrees with the other Passage of the Gospel, in which the Devils driven out by *Jesus Christ* complain to him for the anguish he gives them in driving them out of the Bodies of the possessed. *Art thou come, say they to him, to torment us before the time?* If the Devils actually suffer the Tortures of Hell, what reasonable meaning can one assign for this Expression? The evil *Jesus Christ* did them in driving them out, was certainly too inconsiderable in comparison of their

their Torments, to deserve their Complaints: But being not to suffer Hell-fire before the last Day, they were in the mean time not altogether insensible to Pains of a much less Degree, and they thought they had some Reasons to complain that *Jesus Christ* should torment them before the time appointed by Divine Justice. - Here is something still more decisive, *viz.* what *St. Jude* says in his Epistle v. 6. that *God keeps them in everlasting Chains under profound darkness*, and reserves for the Judgment of the great Day *the Angels which kept not their first Estate*. The first Words of this Passage are evidently metaphorical, and by these *everlasting Chains* we are to understand the irrevocable Judgment God has passed upon these rebellious Spirits; and that the *profound Darkness* signifies the Abyss of Humiliation into which their Sin has plunged them. But the other Words of the Text are so very clear and precise, that no other reasonable Meaning can be given them, but that which agrees with my Opinion. I might perhaps take an additional Advantage of some other Texts of the Scripture; But I hope those I have just quoted are sufficient to convince any Man not given over to Prejudice.

I never shall tell you, Madam, what Tortures the Doctor suffered during this Exposition of the Holy Scripture. He once more would needs interrupt the Author, and pretended that these Passages might be interpreted in quite another Manner. But the Company a second time obliged him to hold his Tongue, and desired the Author at last to tell them what it was he pretended to infer from what he had been saying: For they did not as yet perceive what all this Preamble aimed at. What I pretend to infer, said he, is, that till *Doom's-Day* comes, God,  
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in order not to suffer so many Legions of reprobate Spirits to be of no use, has distributed them thro' the several Spaces of the World, to serve the Designs of his Providence, and make his Omnipotence to appear. Some continuing in their natural State, busy themselves in tempting Men, about seducing and tormenting them, either immediately as *Job's Devil*, and those that lay hold of human Bodies, or by the Ministry of Sorcerers, and of Phantoms. These wicked Spirits are those whom the Scripture calls the *Powers of Darkeness*, and the *Powers of the Air*, God, with the others, makes Millions of Beasts of all Kinds, which serve for the several Uses of Man, which fill the Universe, and cause the Wisdom and Omnipotence of the Creator to be admired. By that Means, added he, I easily conceive how on the one Hand the Devil's can tempt us, and on the other how Beasts can think, know, have Sentiments and a Spiritual Soul, without any way striking at the Doctrines of Religion. I am no longer surprized to see them have Dexterity, Fore-cast, Memory, and Judgment. I should rather have Occasion to wonder at their having no more of those Qualities, since their Soul very likely is more perfect than ours. But I discover the Reason of this. It is because in Beasts as well as in ourselves, the Operations of the Mind are dependent on the material Organs of the Machine to which it is united, and these Organs being grosser and less perfect in Beasts than in us, it follows that the Knowledge, the Thoughts, and the other Spiritual Operations of Beasts must of course be less perfect than ours; and if these proud Spirits know their own dismal State, what an Humiliation must it be to them, thus to see themselves reduced to the Condition of Beasts! But, whether

whether they know it or no, so shameful a Degradation is still with regard to them that primary Effect of the Divine Vengeance I just mentioned. It is an anticipated Hell.

Here a very beautiful Lady, whom this Discourse put out of Humour, could not help interrupting the Author of the New System. Sir, said she with a good deal of Fire, it is of little Consequence to me whether the Devils be humbled or no, and actually suffer the Tortures of Hell; but I will never allow Beasts to be Devils. How! shall my little *Bitch* be a Devil that lies with me all Night and caresses me all Day? I never will grant you that. And I say the same of my *Parrot*, added a young Lady; it is a charming Creature; but if I was persuaded it was a little Devil, I am sure I should no longer indure it. I conceive, said the Author, how great your Aversion for this System must be, and I excuse it: But give yourself the trouble to reflect upon it, and you shall see that it is only the Result of a Prejudice which must be conquered by Reason. Do we love Beasts for their own sakes? No. As they are altogether Strangers to human Society, they can have no other Appointment but that of being useful and amusing. And what care we whether it be a Devil or some other Being that serves and amuses us? The Thought of it, far from shocking pleases me mightily. I with Gratitude admire the Goodness of the Creator, who gave me so many little Devils to serve and amuse me. If I am told that these poor Devils are doomed to suffer eternal Tortures, I admire God's Decrees; but I have no manner of share in this dreadful Sentence. I leave the Execution of it to the Sovereign Judge, and notwithstanding this I live with my little Devils as I do with a Mul-

itude of People of whom Religion informs me that a great number shall be damned. But the cure of a Prejudice is not to be effected in a Moment: It is done by Time and Reflexion. Give me leave then lightly to touch upon this Difficulty, in order to observe a very important thing to you.

Persuaded as we are that Beasts have Intelligence, have we not all of us a thousand times pitied them for the excessive Evils, which the Majority of them are exposed to, and in reality suffer? How unhappy is the Condition of Horses, we are apt to say, seeing a Horse whom an unmerciful Carman is murdering with Blows! How miserable is a Dog that they are breaking for Hunting! How dismal is the fate of Beasts living in Woods! They are perpetually exposed to the Injuries of the Weather, always seized with Apprehensions of becoming the Prey of Hunters or of some wilder Animal; for ever obliged, after long Fatigue, to look out for some poor insipid Food; often suffering cruel Hunger, and subject moreover to Illness and Death! If Men are subject to a multitude of Miseries that overwhelm them, Religion acquaints us with the Reason of it, *viz.* their being born Sinners. But what Crimes can Beasts have committed, by birth to be subjected to Evils so very cruel?

At these last Words our Doctor made so furious a Grimace, striking his Hand on his Knee, that the Company could not help laughing. I see, Sir, said the Author, addressing to him, what it is that offends you. You imagine that the Reflection I have been making, is contrary to what you call in Theology *the State of pure Nature*; but you are mistaken. I acknowledge as well as you, that, independent of all Sin, God might have created Man (and much more the Beasts) subject



subject to all the Miseries which are the natural Consequences of their Constitution. But the Evils we endure, are they in reality such as they would have been in *the State of pure Nature*? No. You are obliged to acknowledge that they are much greater, and many Divines propose, even after St. *Austin*, this Excess of Misery as a Proof of the Existence of an original Sin. What are we then to think of the horrid Excesses of Misery undergone by Beasts; Miseries indeed far greater than those of Men? This is in any other System an incomprehensible Mystery; whereas nothing is more easy to be conceived from the System I propose. The rebellious Spirits deserve a Punishment still more rigorous, and happy is it for them that their Punishment is deferred. In a Word, God's Goodness is vindicated; Man himself is justified: For what Right can he have, without Necessity, and often in the way of meer Diversion to take away the Life of Millions of Beasts, if God had not authorized him so to do; and Beasts being as sensible as ourselves of Pain and Death, how could a just and merciful God have given Man that Privilege, if they were not so many guilty Victims of the divine Vengeance?

But hear, continued he, something still more convincing, and of greater Consequence. Beasts by nature are extremely vicious. We know very well that they never Sin, because they are not free; but this is the only Condition wanting to make them Sinners. The voracious Beasts and Birds of Prey are cruel. Many Insects of one and the same Species devour each other. *Cats* are perfidious and ungrateful. *Monkeys* are mischievous. *Dogs* are envious. All Beasts in general are jealous and revengeful to excess, not to mention many other Vices which we observe in them; and at

the same time that they are by Nature so very vicious, they have, say we, neither the Liberty nor any Helps to resist the Bias that hurries them into so many bad Actions. They are, according to the Schools, necessitated to do Evil, to disconcert the general Order, to commit whatever is in Nature most contrary to the Notion we have of natural Justice, and to the Principles of Virtue. What Monsters these, in a World originally created for Order and Justice to reign in! This is in good part what formerly persuaded the *Manicheans*, that there were of necessity two Principles of things; one good, the other bad; and that Beasts were not the Work of the good Principle. A monstrous Error! But how then shall we believe that Beasts came out of the Hands of the Creator, with Qualities so very strange? If Man is so very wicked and corrupt, it is because he has himself through Sin perverted the happy Nature God had given him at his Formation. Of two things then we must say one; either that God has taken delight in making Beasts so vicious as they are, and in giving us in them Models of what is most shameful in the World; or that they have, like Man, original Sin, which has perverted their primitive Nature.

The first of these Propositions finds very difficult Access to the Mind, and is an express Contradiction of the Holy Scripture, which says, that whatever came out of God's Hands at the time of the Creation of the World *was good*, and even *very good*. For if Beasts were at that time what they are now-a-Days, how could they be stiled *good*, and *very good*? What good can there be in a *Monkey's* being so mischievous, a *Dog* so full of Envy, and a *Cat* so perfidious? But then many Authors have pretended that Beasts,  
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before Man's Fall, were different from what they now are, and that it was in order to punish Man, they were rendered so wicked : But this Opinion is a meer Supposition, of which there is not the least Foot-step in the Holy Scripture. It is a pitiful Subterfuge to elude a real Difficulty. This at most might be said of the Beasts with whom Man has a sort of Correspondence, but not at all of the Birds, Fishes, and Insects, which have no manner of Relation to him. We must then have recourse to the second Proposition, and say, that the Nature of Beasts has, like that of Man, been corrupted by some original Sin : Another Hypothesis void of Foundation, and equally inconsistent with Reason and Religion in all the Systems, which have been hitherto espoused concerning the Soul of Beasts. What Party are we to take? Why, admit of my System, and all is explained. The Souls of Beasts are refractory Spirits, which have made themselves guilty towards God. This Sin in Beasts is no original Sin. It is a personal Crime, which has corrupted and perverted their Nature in it's whole Substance. Hence all the Vices and Corruption we observe in them, though they can be no longer criminal, because God, by irrecoverably reprobating them, has at the same time divested them of their Liberty.

I am still to satisfy you, said the Author, upon two Questions which you will infallibly ask me; *viz.* How are the Devils united to the Bodies of Beasts, and what do they become at the Hour of Death? To answer the first Question, we should be let into the Mystery of the Union of our Soul and our Body; and this no Philosopher will be ever able to conceive. Let us then be contented with saying, that, as Man is a Soul and an organized Body united, so is each Beast a Devil united



united to a Body organized; and that as Man has not two Souls, Beasts likewise have each but one Devil. This is so very true, that *Jesus Christ* having one day driven out many Devils, and these having asked his leave to enter into a Herd of *Swine* that fed near the Sea, he permitted it, and they entered into the *Swine* accordingly. But what happened? Each *Swine* having his own Devil already, there was a Battle, and the whole Herd threw themselves headlong into the Sea.

This Union once supposed, we ought not to be surprized at any thing in Beasts. They must have a Knowledge and a Sentiment like ours; and from what passes within us, they must be jealous, cholerick, perfidious, ungrateful, and self-interested like ourselves. They must be either gay or sad according to Events or their present Disposition. They must have Love and Hatred, and Desire for multiplying their Species, an Affection for their Young, and a Care to bring them up: In a Word, they must do all what they do, and which seems incomprehensible to us when a spiritual Soul is not granted them. However, it may be proper to observe, that as the rebellious Spirits have deserved to be degraded in this Manner for having abused their Reason and Lights, *God* has been minded to humble them with regard to their very Reason, by making them depend on Organs so very gross, that it is infinitely inferior to that of Men. Thence it happens, that we now and then judge that Beasts do some acts of Reason; but we have great Reason to believe, that they never make many coherent and reflected Judgments like ourselves, because their Organs will not allow of Motions so very delicate. This constitutes *Automata*, which most commonly act only mechanically, though with Knowledge; and this is  
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to a Spirit the utmost Degree of Humiliation. It is not thus with their Sensations: For the rebellious sinned not by their Senses: They had none. Besides, Senses are always material Organs and gross Interpreters. Let their Use be ever so perfect, it is always a Degree of Humiliation to a Devil created to be a pure Spirit, and of course to know and perceive in a much more perfect Manner. For this Reason it was, that God has not given Beasts Senses of a coarser kind than ours. The Spirits which animate them are sufficiently punished, by being made subject to material Senses. It even seems that God, either to humble us also, or to cause the Variety of his Productions to be admired, has been pleased to give some Beasts Organs and Sensations much nicer and more perfect than ours. For Instance, the Birds of Prey have so piercing an Eye, the Dog so exquisite a Smell, the Spider so subtile a Feeling, that no Man can come up to them in these Points.

The extreme Littleness of an infinite Number of Beasts (It is still the Author that speaks) might impose upon such Persons as have not sufficiently reflected on the Nature of Things. How! will one say, is it possible to believe that a Devil can be lodged in a Fly, a Flea, or a Mite? But how! might not he be as well lodged there as in a Horse or an Ox? A Spirit having absolutely no Extension, in order to be united to a Body does not require that this Body be more or less extensive. The very minute Quantity of Matter is enough for him, provided it be organized: and there is none, tho' ever so small, but what might be so. God might have made Man as little as the minute Insect; and if he had done it our Souls would not value themselves the less, or think

think themselves the less happily lodged on that account. The Reason is, because there is no absolute Magnitude in the World. A Flea in itself is neither large nor small. It is small only with regard to us who are infinitely larger, and it is large with regard to a Multitude of other Creatures which are a Million of Times minuter. All this proves, that Ignorance alone or some false Prejudices can make us set between Beasts any Distinction or Preference founded on their large or little Size. It is not, therefore, more difficult to think that a Devil may be united to the Body of a Fly than to that of an Elephant; and to a Spirit it is indeed a Thing absolutely indifferent.

As to the second Question, added the Author, concerning what becomes of the Devils after the Death of Beasts, it is again very easy to be answered. *Pythagoras* taught formerly, and at this Day some *Indian* Philosophers believe the *Metempsychosis*; that is are of Opinion, that at the Moment of our Death our Souls pass into the Body of a Man or a Beast, to begin a new Life again, and so successively till the end of Ages. This System which is unwarrantable with regard to Men, and is besides proscribed by Religion, is admirably well suited to Beasts in the System I have here proposed, and clashes neither with Religion nor with Reason. The Devils, by God appointed to be Beasts, necessarily out-live their Bodies, and would cease to answer their Destination, if at the Moment of the Destruction of their first Body they passed not immediately into another, to begin to live a-new under another Form. Thus such or such a Devil, after having been a Cat or a Goat, is forced to pass into the Embryo of a Bird, a Fish, or a Butter-Fly, to animate them.



them. Happy those who light upon a good Lodging, as many Birds, Horses, and Dogs do; and woe to such as become Beasts of Burden, or the Hunter's Game. It is a kind of Lottery, in which the Devils very likely have not themselves the Choice of their Lots.

It might be thought however, that they never change their Species, and that the Devil which had once been a Horse, is always to be a Horse again. But this Opinion would be liable to very great Difficulty. For as the Species of Beasts oftentimes increase and diminish upon the Earth, it would thence follow, either that there would be sometimes too few Devils to supply a certain Species, or sometimes too many, so that some would remain in Relays and without Employment, which is not likely; whereas by admitting a general Metempsychosis, you prevent all Difficulties.

All Kinds of Beasts most commonly produce a much greater Number of Eggs or Embryos than is necessary to perpetuate them in the same Number. Therefore the Devils, whom God has destined to animate them, never want Employment or Lodging. For if any Species happens to fail or be considerably diminished, they may pass into the Eggs of another and multiply that. This is what sometimes causes those prodigious Clouds of Locusts, and those innumerable Swarms of Caterpillars, which lay waste our Fields and Gardens. We look into Cold or Heat, Rains or Winds, for the Cause of these amazing Multiplications, and the true Reason is, that in the Year they come, or in the foregoing, an extraordinary Number of Deer; Birds or Fishes have perished with all their Eggs; so that the Devils which animated them have been obliged, suddenly, to get into the very first Species they found disposed

to receive them, and which had as it were so many Houses to be let.

In short, concluded the Author, you see, that the more this System is searched into, the more you find in it some of these Characters of Probability which strike and persuade us. It is a Source of extraordinary Observations, which satisfies our Curiosity. I find the Foundations of it in Religion itself. Reason supplies me with the most likely Proof of it, and Prejudices can oppose to it none but frivolous Difficulties. Can a Man refuse his Approbation of a System so plausible and so well supported on every Side?

I know not, Madam, what You will think of a System so new and so very singular. But I must tell you that its very great Singularity was mighty agreeable to the whole Company; some took it merely for a Piece of Wit and an ingenious Pleasantry; others look'd upon it as a System that deserved to be seriously believed. For my part, as you know I am a perfect *Pyrrhonian* in Point of Systems; I was contented with giving the Author the Praises, which good Breeding requires in a Case like this, without explaining myself farther. The Truth is that I knew and still know not what to think of it. For on the one hand I find that the System very well answers all Difficulties, and that it would be no easy Matter to prove it false. But on the other hand I don't see it built upon Foundations sufficiently solid to produce a real Persuasion. And as it besides concerns some Points of Religion, I think it would be a Rashness to espouse it without the tacit Consent at least of the Doctors. Our *Abbe* was not so Circumspect as I. He would needs return to the Charge. The Author let him speak long enough, and then was preparing to

to give an Answer. On this Play was proposed. The two Champions retired in a corner of the Room, to continue their Dispute, and I could not hear their Arguments.

But I take notice that here is already much Writing, and not one Word mentioned of the principal Question you made me upon the Language of Beasts. Let us then make an End of this first Discussion; and resume our Propositions. It is certain that Beasts have an intelligent Faculty; be the Principle of it what it will. It is a Fact so generally confessed by all Men, that I did not so much go about proving it to you as I intended to amuse you by exposing the several Opinions. Let us therefore examine now whether they speak or no.

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## II.

### *Of the Necessity of a Language between BEASTS.*

**F**IRST, let us evidence the Possibility of it. In the common Use, what we call speaking is making one's self understood by a sequel of Words articulated, whereby Men have agreed to express such an Idea or Sentiment; and the total Collection of these Words is what we call a Language, which is different among different Nations. If Beasts speak, they certainly do it not by means of a Language of this Kind. But it is impossible, without this Assistance, to make one's self understood, and to speak in reality? Of this we cannot possibly doubt. Angels speak to each other, and yet have no Voice. Let us lay aside



what is supernatural. When we are pleased, every thing in us speaks. Do we not every Day speak by certain Looks, by a Motion of the Head, a Gesture, nay! The least Sign in the World? Imagine to yourself, Madam, a Nation of Dumb-People. Do you think they would not deliver their Minds to each other, and by Cries, Gestures, Looks, and Postures, supply the Want of our Words and Phrases? For my Part, I think they would live very well in a Society like ourselves, and that after the first among them should have with some Difficulty established some sensible Signs and Expressions, they would easily teach them to their Children: That these would improve more and more in this way of expressing themselves, and by degrees would form, not indeed a Tongue, but a very distinct Language, and as intelligible to them as our Dialects are to us. Of this we have such amazing Instances, that it is impossible to call it in Question; and I shall even maintain, that the same Idea being expressible many different ways, there might possibly be in such a Language a Choice of Expressions, Energy, Eloquence, Simplicity, Metaphors, and perhaps even Affectation. No doubt but there would also be Obscurity and Equivocations in it: But where are these not to be found? Let us then apply this Example to Beasts. They have no Tongues; but why should they not have a Speech? The thing evidently is possible: Let us now examine whether it is necessary.

All Beasts, it must be owned, have a knowing Faculty: Nor do we see that the Author of Nature can have given them this Faculty, for any other Purpose than to enable them to provide for their Wants, their Preservation, and whatever is fit for their Condition, and suitable to the peculiar

liar kind of Life he has appointed for them. Let us add to this Principle, that many Species of Beasts are made to live in Society at large, and the others either to live Male and Female in a kind of House-keeping, or in a kind of Family with their Young till they are brought up. A few Exceptions, which might be opposed to this general Law, are not to be accounted any thing. To begin now by mentioning the first Species only: What Use do we conceive Beasts might make their Understanding for the Preservation and Wellfare of their Society, and of course for their own peculiar Good resulting therefrom, if the Members of that Society have not among themselves a common Language perfectly known to every one of them? Let us resume the Example of a Nation of dumb People, and suppose that besides the want of Speech, Nature has even refused them all possible Means of communicating their Thoughts to one another: What use could they make of their Knowledge and Understanding? It is plain that being able neither to understand nor to be understood, they could neither afford nor receive any Help from the Society. Far from mutually assisting each other, they necessarily must be in a perpetual Opposition. The Distrust would be general. Injuries, Hatred, and Revenge, would break all Principles of Union between them, and they being soon changed into wild Beasts, would think of nothing but destroying each other. In a Word, no more Communication, no more Society.

It would be much the same thing with the Beasts which live in Society, if you suppose that they have not a Language among themselves to understand each other, be it what will, you can no longer conceive how their Society could subsist. Let us take the Beavers for an Instance. These

Animals

Animals, to be under Covert and Secure, live in small Huts of Clay, which they build for themselves with amazing Dexterity on the Border of a Lake, and set upon Piles. But they have found that, as they stood in need of each other's Help to build their Dwellings, they must of course live in Society. They then get thirty, forty, more or less together, and after they have pitched upon a Soil fit for their Habitation, and where they hope to live more conveniently and secure, they divide among themselves the Works necessary for the Construction of their Abodes. Some go and fetch the Wood: Others provide the Clay which some of them are commissioned to bring; and this by lying upon their Back with their Paws up, as we know they do, to make a sort of Cart of their Body, which the others drag along to the Place where it is to be used. There one does the Part of a Mason, another that of a Labourer; and a third that of an Architect. A Tree is first cut at the Root, and falls into the Lake. This done, other Artificers work it: Some prepare the Piles; others drive them into the Ground; while others are forming the several Timbers necessary. All is done orderly and in perfect Concert. You would think you saw the *Tyrians* building the City of *Carthage*. The lazy or the froward are undoubtedly punished. The Centries faithfully do their Duty. The Work is carried on to Perfection. It is the Admiration of Men themselves; and then the little Corporation quietly enjoying the Benefit of their Work, no longer have any other Thought; but that of living easy, and of multiplying their Species each in his little Family.

Does not so coherent and so well executed an Understanding evidently intimate the Necessity of  
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a Language among these Animals, and their having a Speech whereby they mutually communicate their Thoughts to each other? Pray, Madam, consider what is said of the Tower of *Babel*. The Means God made use of to make that extravagant Project abortive (a sure and infallible Means indeed!) was the Confusion of their Languages. The Workmen having all on a sudden forgot the common Language which they spoke before, and being no longer able to understand each other, became incapable of acting in concert, and were obliged to give over their Enterprize. The same must happen to any Society whose Members shall not be able to understand one another. Bring thirty People together speaking each a different Language, and you will soon see Disorder and Confusion among them. What would then happen, if these thirty People could not speak at all, and had no Means left of delivering their Thoughts? Let us suppose the Beavers to be really in that Condition; what would be the Consequence? I see in a Moment all the Society disordered; without Chief, without Subordination, without Counsel, without Concert. I see all the Works which require the Assistance of many Hands, necessarily abandoned. No more Centinels that watch for the public Safety: No dwelling in Common. Every one, as in the Tower of *Babel*, shall retire and live by himself, in short no more Society.

Cannot Instinct, some will say, supply the Want of a Language? Two Beavers meet and join together, because their Instinct inclines them towards forming a Society. A third, then a fourth, and many others successively come and increase the Company: The Society is formed. The same Instinct inclines them to go and fetch Wood and Earth

Earth to build their Huts, just as Birds go and fetch what is necessary to build their Nests. If they seem to divide the Work among them, it is because some of them seeing the others bring the Earth, in their Turn go and fetch Wood; and likewise when they see part of them busy about preparing the Mortar; they, not to remain idle, busy themselves in working the Wood. All this it seems requires no more than Eyes and Instinct. If you see Centinels placed upon the Avenues, it is because in a Troop there is always some one more Timorous or Prudent than the rest, who makes the Precautions he uses for his own Safety serve for the Utility of others.

The Objection has something specious in it, but it must be examined to the Bottom. What is Instinct? It is a Sentiment void of Reflection, whose Principle is unknown; a blind Desire, an undeliberate Bias, a mechanick Motion of our Soul, which prompts us to do a Thing without knowing any Reason why. This Sentiment, if there is such a Thing, is commonly so intricate in Men, that it remains without Effect: Only it is thought to produce very singular Effects in some of them. It is wonderful in Beasts, they say, and by it their most admirable Actions are explained. Nothing in reality is more convenient than this Instinct. But when will Men cease to mistake Words for Things? 1. What we call Instinct is something very obscure and unknown in itself. 2. What Proofs have we that Beasts have more of this Instinct than Men? The Prejudices in this Point have been carried so far as to believe, that Instinct in Beasts is preferable to Reason in Men. But upon what Foundation is human Reason thus degraded to do honour to the Instinct of Beasts? 'Tis true, we see Birds making their Nests with  
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very great Industry. We see some Animals purge themselves by means of certain Herbs which they find out. The Sparrows likewise purge themselves and their Young with Spiders or other Insects.

The Pidgeons and many Birds swallow Gravel to facilitate their Digestion. The Storks, they say, taught Man the Use of Clifters. These are some of the most wonderful Effects of the pretended Instinct of Beasts. For we must not give Credit to many Fables that are set about concerning this Matter; and I see in all this nothing fit to be cried up. 3. But since we cannot refuse Beasts a knowing Faculty, why do we give them a needless Instinct? Why should we attribute to this unknown Instinct what may be the simple Effect of their Understanding; and since it is really in consequence of a Knowing Faculty that Man performs the same Operations, why should not the same Principle also rule in Beasts? Is not this what we call multiplying Beings without Necessity, and endeavouring to throw a Veil upon a Thing in itself plain and perspicuous? For my part, I am persuaded that what we believe Beasts do by an Instinct peculiar to them, they like ourselves do it in consequence of their Knowledge; and with Knowledge. I am even apt to think that what we call Instinct is a meer *Ens Rationis*, a Name void of reality; a Remain of Peripatetic Philosophy. But if Instinct must be admitted, I never will believe that Beasts are better provided with it than Men, so long as no other Argument shall be brought to prove it than Facts which I can account for from simple Knowledge; and if that Instinct is not sufficient to Man to guide him, it must of course be still less sufficient to Beasts.



I then resume my Example and my Argument. If it is not by particular Instinct that Beavers make their little Settlements in so much Concert, they then do it in consequence of their Knowledge. Now I have proved by the Supposition of a whole Nation of People absolutely Dumb, that a knowing Faculty without a reciprocal Communication by means of a sensible and well-known Language, is not sufficient to maintain Society, or to execute any Undertaking that requires Union and Concert. Let us then conclude that, since Nature, which always acts with so much Wisdom, has made the Beavers to live in Society: she has given them all the Means necessary for that Purpose, and of course the Faculty of Speaking, let their Language be what it will; since it is impossible for any Society to subsist without this Help. And as Nature every where follows the same Rules, let us apply this Argument to the Bees, the Ants, and all Kinds of Beasts that live in Society; and by that Means a considerable Part of them must be indowed with the Faculty of Speech.

But can the same Thing be said of the Beasts which do not live in Society? Such are the major Part of the Quadrupeds, the Birds, the Fishes, the Reptiles, which are undeniably the greater Number. I don't know, Madam, whether you perceive the Consequence of the first Step I have just now ventured to make. For if there are any Beasts that speak, they must of necessity all of them speak. If Beavers and Parrots have a Language, the Oyster and Snail must have theirs also. I am, as it were, engaged in a dangerous Defilee, all the Avenues of which are guarded by the strongest Prejudices. But in the Land of Systems, as well as in others, the first Step is often the only difficult

difficult. I have proved, methinks, with Probability enough, that the Beasts living in Society must needs have a Language. I am next to extend the Proposition to all the other Species of Beasts.

And indeed, why should Nature have refused to Some of them a Privilege it has granted to the Rest? Nothing would be more contrary to the Uniformity she affects in all her Productions. I know that Nature, which is as Sparing in Superfluities as she is Prodigal in things Necessary, does nothing in vain. But it is not necessary that a Couple of Beasts joined to form a Household and a Family together, a Couple of Birds for instance, be able to understand and mutually to impart their Sentiments and Thoughts to each other? Bring together and associate two People absolutely Dumb, I defy the Union to subsist, if they have no Means left of agreeing about their Affairs, and of expressing their mutual Wants. Two Sparrows without any kind of Language, will lye under the same Impossibility of living together, and all the Inconveniences of the dumb Society I have mentioned, will be seen in their little Family. In a Word, the Necessity of a Language between a Husband and his Wife, to enable them to live together, is just the same as for a whole Society.

Nature, without any Impossibility, might have made some Animals to live in an absolute Solitude, and accordingly have given them both Sexes, to be able to multiply themselves as Plants do, without the Assistance of Copulation, and differently from Snails and Worms, which, though they have both Sexes, cannot use them any otherwise than by coupling. If you suppose that there are Beasts of this kind in the Universe, I shall readily con-

fess that Nature, had she indow'd them with the Faculty of Speaking, would have given them a needless Talent. But wherever two Beasts shall stand in an habitual Need of each other, and form among them a lasting Society, they of necessity must speak to each other. How is it to be conceived, that two Sparrows in the Heat of their Lust, or in the Cares attending the bringing up of their Family, have not a thousand Things to say to each other? This would be the Place of invivening our Subject by curious Particularities. But my Intention is not to make a philosophical Work degenerate into Buffoonry. You see I insist upon none but solid Arguments, and I say it is impossible in the Order of Nature, that a Sparrow who loves his Wife, has not, in order to persuade her, a Language full of Expression and Tenderneſs. He must scold her when she plays the Coquet: He must menace the Sparks that come to cajole her: He must be able to understand her when she calls him: He must, while she is assiduously sitting on her Brood, be able to provide Necessaries for her, and discern whether it is some Food she asks for, or Feathers to repair her Nest; for all which Things a Language is necessary.

Many Beasts, one will say, have not a settled and permanent Household like Birds: (For by the bye Birds are the Model of conjugal Constancy and Fidelity:) This I very well know, and their Number is even very great. Such are Dogs, Horses, Deer, and almost all Quadrupeds, Fishes and Reptiles. But I shall always insist upon a Principle granted and acknowledged as certain. Nature is too much like herself in Productions of one and the same Genus, to have put between Beasts so essential a Difference or that of speaking  
 or



or not speaking at all would be. Upon this Principle it is, that though we hardly know the Seeds of Coral, of Mushrooms, of Truffles, and of Fern, we are nevertheless persuaded that these Plants proceed from Seeds; because it is the Manner in which Nature produces all the rest. Let us then conclude, that if Nature has given the Beasts living in Society and in a Family the Faculty of Speaking; she doubtless has bestowed the same Advantage upon all the rest. For we are not now upon one of those accidental Differences which Nature loves to diversify in the different Species of one Genus. There are not perhaps in the whole World two Faces perfectly alike; but yet all Men have a Face. There are among the several Species of Animals Differences still greater. Some have Wings, others have Fins, others have Feet and Legs. The Serpents have none of these; But all Animals have the Faculty of moving and of transporting themselves wherever they please according to their Wants. Among Animals there are some who see and hear more or less perfectly, but yet they all hear and see. It is the same thing with the Faculty of Speech. This Faculty perhaps is more perfect in the Beasts which live in Society and form Families; But it being in some, we must believe it to be in all of them, but more or less perfect according to their respective Wants.

It is even observable, that the Animals who live neither in Society nor in a settled Family, yet have in each Species a Sort of Commerce and Society among themselves. Such are the Quadrupeds, the Fishes, the Reptiles, the Birds themselves independently of their Household, as Starlings, Partridges, Ravens, Ducks, and Hens. Now, what Utility could Beasts fetch from endeavouring

deavouring to live in Society one with another, if they did it not for mutual Assistance, and reciprocally to have the Benefit of their Knowledge, Discoveries, and of all the Helps they can afford each other; and how could they do so, if they understand not one another? All the Arguments I have already used to prove that the Beasts which live in Society must have a Language, here again find their Place and their whole Energy. All the Difference must be only in the Degrees of *Plus* and *Minus*, and if we judge of this from Matters of Fact, probably there is no Difference at all.

The Wolves, for instance, hunt with very great Skill, and together contrive warlike Stratagems. A Man crossing a Field saw a Wolf who seemed to be watching a Flock of Sheep. He informed the Shepherd of it, and advised him to cause this Animal to be pursued by his Dogs. I shan't be such a Fool replied the Shepherd; The Wolf yonder is there only to divert my Attention, and another Wolf who is working on the other Side, only watches the Moment when I shall set my Dogs upon this, to snatch one of my Sheep from me. The Man who was going by, willing to be satisfied of the Fact, promised to pay for the Sheep, and the Thing happened just as the Shepherd had said it would. Does not a Stratagem so well concerted evidently suppose, that the two Wolves had agreed together, one to shew and the other to hide himself? Now how is it possible to agree in this Manner without the Help of Speech?

A Sparrow finding a Nest which a Swallow had just built standing very convenient for him, possessed himself of it. The Swallow seeing the Usurper in her House called for Help to expel him. A thousand Swallows came full speed and attacked the

the Sparrow: But the Latter being covered on every Side, and presenting only his large Beak at the narrow Entrance of the Nest, was invulnerable and made the boldest of them who durst approach him to repent their Temerity. After a Quarter of an Hour's Combat all the Swallows disappeared. The Sparrow thought he had got the better, and the Spectators judged that the Swallows had abandoned the Undertaking. Not in the least. Immediately we saw them return to the Charge; and each of them having provided a little of that tempered Earth where-with they make their Nests, they all at once fell upon the Sparrow, and inclosed him in the Nest, to perish there, since they could not drive him thence. Do you believe, Madam, that the Swallows have been able to hatch and concert this Design all of them together, without speaking to each other?

Wonders are recounted of the Monkies when they go o' Plundering. A Troop of Soldiers that goes o' Forraging in the Neighbourhood of the Enemy, cannot march in greater Order or with more Precaution. I could mention a thousand like Instances: But this would require a Volume; and I aim only at supporting my Argument. Men hitherto have always made use of these Examples to prove that Beasts have a knowing Faculty; and they have been in the right, so to do, because it is really unconceivable that Beasts can do such singular Actions without Knowledge. But we evidently have not sufficiently examined into the Case, and it being equally impossible for Beasts to do these Actions without Speaking, we are moreover obliged to conclude that they also speak to one another. Now, Madam, I would beg of you here to observe, that this is not an Opinion  
or



of a System founded upon meer Conjectures or probable Explications, but an Argument supported by sensible and palpable Facts. I say sensible Matters of Fact, such as these I have just alledged, and a thousand the like in every Kind. Enter into a Wood where there are a Parcel of Jays. The first who sees you gives the Alarm to the whole Troop, and the Noise continues till you are gone, or till your Presence has made them fly off. Magpies, Blackbirds, and almost all the feathered Kinds do the same. Let a Cat but shew herself upon the top of a House or in a Garden; the very first Sparrow that perceives her; exactly does what a Centinel who sees the Enemy does among us. He by his Cries warns all his Companions, and seems to imitate the Noise of a Drum beating a March. See a Cock near his Hen, a Dove near the Female he is wooing, a Cat following his Mate, there is no end of their Discourses.

Nor would there be any End of mine, if I were to leave no Particularity untouched, and yet I intend to set Bounds to this little Work. I shall add but one important Reflection, which in my Opinion is a kind of Demonstration. We every Day speak to Beasts and they understand us very well. The Shepherd makes himself understood by his Sheep. The Cows understand all the Milk-maid says to them. We speak to our Horses, Dogs, and Birds, and they understand us. Beasts in their turn speak to us, and we understand them.

How much more must they make themselves understood by their Like! For with regard to them we can have no other than a foreign Language; and if Nature has enabled them to understand a foreign Language, how can she have refused them the Faculty of Understanding and Speaking,

Speaking, a natural one. Your Bitch, for instance, has a great deal of Wit, you converse with her all day long : You understand her, and she understands you : But you may be sure that when a Dog comes to caress her, she understands and is understood by him still much better.

Confess then, Madam, that Beasts speak, and that it is fit to believe it; since Reason, the Laws of Nature, Matters of Fact, and Experience, all concur to prove it to a Degree of Evidence capable of fixing our Uncertainty in that Point. However, I don't know whether I have persuaded you. For I never knew any thing so difficult in the World, as to persuade any one of a Sentiment which he has not himself fetched from his own Lights ; unless it flatters Self-love. But you will own at least, that my Opinion is sufficiently supported, to have a Place among the several Systems that fill up the Leisure of Philosophers. Another Confession which I require of you, and which shall be infinitely more agreeable to me, is, that you cannot but be satisfied with my Complaisance ; and to leave you nothing to desire on this Point, I shall here proceed and treat on the third and last Point remaining to be examined.

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### III.

#### *Of the Language of BEASTS.*

**D**O you expect, Madam, that because I am persuaded that Beasts speak ; I must explain their Language to you, and give you a Dictionary of it ? I own the Thing appears very

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difficult

difficult to me, and I am at no small loss how to begin. I shall go back to our Principle; and following the Order of the different Reflexions which this Subject shall suggest, I shall do all you can reasonably require for the clearing of this Matter. But you are to expect none but general Observations; for Particularities would here degenerate into downright Buffoonry.

Why has Nature given Beasts the Faculty of Speech? Why, to no other End but that they might express their Desires and Sentiments one to another, and by that Means supply their Wants and whatever is necessary for their Preservation. I know that Language in general has still another Intention, which is to express Ideas, Knowledge, Reflexions, and Arguments. But whatever System we follow as to the Knowledge of Beasts, even though it were my System of Devils which gives them a spiritual Soul capable of reasoning; it is certain that Nature indowed them with no other Knowledge but that which is useful and necessary for the Preservation of the Species and of each Individual. Consequently, no abstract Ideas, no metaphysical Reasonings, no various Researches upon all the Objects which surround them, no other Science in short but that of being in Health, of Self-preservation, of avoiding whatever can hurt, and of procuring whatever can be beneficial to them. Therefore none of them was ever seen making Speeches in public, or disputing about Causes and their Effects. They know no other than the animal Life.

From this Reflection flows another, *viz.* that at the same Time that Nature has confined the Knowledge of Beasts within so narrow a Compass, she of Necessity has also proportionably confined their Desires, their Passions, and of course their  
Wants.



Wants. For it is our Desires that make our Wants, and Knowledge that gives birth to our Desires. To know that one may be happy and to wish to be so, is in the Heart of Man but one and the same Thing. Before he had sinned, his Eyes were shut to all worldly and sensible Goods. 'He had no Desire for them. Sin opened his Eyes, and to his Misfortune he coveted these Goods. Happy the wise Man who knows how to restrain his Desires within the Bounds prescribed by Religion and Reason. No more of your Morality, you will say, let us come to the Point.

Glory, Grandeur, Riches, Reputation, Pageantry, and Luxury, are Names unknown to Beasts, and which you will not find in the Dictionary of their Language. They can express nothing but their Desires, and these are limited purely to what is necessary for their Preservation. Hear a Dog speak. He never will complain that his Kennel is not gilt, or his Meat not offered him in a Silver Dish. He never will sue for the Privilege of commanding all the Dogs in the House. All he will ask from you is a small Portion of Food to subsist on. If you menace him, he will endeavour to appease you. If you leave him alone, by his Cries he will express his Despair, and the Apprehension he is under of being abandoned for ever. If you take him with you o' walking, he will thank you with a thousand Expressions of Joy. If he sees any Object that frightens him, he will by his Motions and Barkings inform you of it. In short speak to him of eating, drinking, sleeping, running, fooling, of defending himself against his Enemy, and of defending you as his Protector and only Support, he will understand and answer you very well, because all this tends

to his Preservation, for which alone Nature has given him the Faculty of Understanding, and that of making himself understood, that is of speaking. But avoid treating with him about Philosophy and Morality. It would be using a foreign Language, to all the Expressions of which he is an absolute Stranger. His Knowledge and Wants do not reach so far; but bring a Bitch to him. They will soon get acquainted, and the Conversation begin. Nor are you to expect that he will lose Time, in making Compliments to the Fair upon her Beauty, her Shape, Wit, Extraction and Youth. All these Advantages are to him so many unknown Ideas, which he can neither understand nor express. The only Thing that moves him at that Instant is a Desire of multiplying his Species, or at least of using the proper Means for it. On this only Topick it is that the whole Conversation runs. But then it is Life and Fire itself. In an amorous Beast, every thing is as expressive as in the most passionate Man. His Gestures, his Voice, his Motions, all in short speak his Passion.

This Principle supplies us with our first Observation upon the Language of Beasts; *viz.* that it is very limited, since it does not extend beyond the Necessaries of Life. However, let us not impose upon ourselves with regard to this Point. To take Things right, the Language of Beasts appears so limited to us only with Relation to ours, which is perhaps too diffuse. Limited as it is, it is sufficient to Beasts, and more would be of no service to them. Were it not to be wished, that ours, at least in some respects, were less abundant and prolix? Men are naturally great Talkers and, if I dare say so, blab much. They never have Words enough to express all they want to say.

say. Not satisfied with simple Ideas, they love as it were to dissect them into Sub-divisions; they sometimes seem willing to anatomize an Idea or a Sentiment, as a Surgeon would do a Man's Head. So many Words must of course be newly coined: And what Words too! why, such as are void of meaning, obscure, equivocal, and fitter to breed Disputes than to instruct the Mind.

On the other Hand, how do Men abuse the Facility of speaking Nature has given them! How many Errors and Falshoods are the ordinary Topicks of our Conversations! How many Extravagances and Trifles, Slandering and wicked Discourses! If Beasts should hear us converse, prate, lye, slander, and rave; would they have Reason to envy us the Use we make of Speech? They have not our Priviledges; but in recompense they have not our Failings. They speak little, but always to the purpose, and that knowingly. They always speak Truth, and never deceive, not even in point of Love. And is not this an Advantage they have over us? With regard to this, they are nearly in the same Case with the Peasants in our Countries, and the Negroes and Savages of *America*. I might even make Philosophers of them, and compare at least many of their Species with *Diogenes* living in a little Tub, content with bare Necessaries, avoiding the Commerce of Men, and never speaking but out of meer Necessity. Such is one of those great long whiskered and well-furred Cats, which you see quietly couching in a Corner, leisurely digesting his Food, sleeping at Discretion, sometimes taking the Diversion of hunting, and moreover enjoying Life with Tranquility, without minding the Events which ruffle us, and without plaguing his Brains with a thousand needless Reflections, nor caring to impart his own Thoughts  
to



to others. 'Tis true, the sight of a She Cat will be sufficient to disconcert all his Philosophy ; but are our Philosophers a whit wiser on the like Occasion ?

Let us however stick close to Truth. I intend neither to be seduced nor to dazzle my own Eyes by Arguments less solid than specious. Beasts in general speak little. There are even some of so silent a Disposition, that they won't drop four Words a Day. Such are among those we know, Asses, Horses, Oxen, Sheep, and the major Part of the Quadrupeds. The Reason is very plain. It is because Nature has given these Animals only a Food so very slight and easy to be digested, that they are incessantly obliged to renew it, in order to prevent Hunger, and this takes up most of their Leisure. But in return you must own, that there are Animals which speak without the least Intermision. Such are among others the Birds. (and here I beg of you to observe that it is the Females who speak the least) As the Language of Birds is, as I may say, the best articulated, and the most sensible to us, let us take it for an Example. From it you shall be able to judge of the Language of the other Beasts, by putting between them the Differences which are easily observed in each Species.

Birds Sing, they say: But this is a Mistake. Birds do not Sing but speak. What we take for Singing is no more than their natural Language. Do the Magpy, the Jay, the Raven, the Owl, and the Duck Sing? What makes us believe that they Sing is their tuneful Voice. Thus the *Hottentots* in *Africa* seem to cluck like Turkey-cocks tho' it be the natural Accent of their Language, and thus several Nations seem to us to sing, when they indeed speak. Birds, if you will, Sing in the  
same

same Sense; but they sing not for singing's sake as we fancy they do. Their Singing is always an intended Speech; and it is comical enough that there should be thus in the World so numerous a Nation, which never speak otherwise but tunably and musically. But in short, what do these Birds say? The Question should be proposed to *Apollonius Tyanaeus*, who boasted of understanding their Language. As for me, who am no Diviner, I can give you no more than probable Conjectures.

Let us take for our Example the Maggy, which is so great a Chatterer. It is easy to perceive, that her Discourses or Songs are varied. She sometimes lowers or raises her Voice, sometimes hastens or slackens the Measure, and sometimes lengthens or shortens her Chit-chat. And these evidently are so many different Sentences. Now following the Rule I have laid down, that the Knowledge, Desires, Wants, and of Course the Expressions of Beasts are confined to what is useful or necessary for their Preservation, methinks nothing is more easy than at first, and in general to understand the meaning of these different Phrases. Nor must you take this for Pleasantry; it is downright Truth, or at least what I thought came nearest to it. For a Maggy having no Speech but what is useful or necessary to her, whenever she speaks do but observe what Circumstance she is in with regard to her Wants. Then reflect what you would say yourself in a like Situation, and this will be exactly the very thing she says. For Instance, if she speaks, eating with a good Appetite, she infallibly says at that time what you would say yourself on the like Occasion: "That is very good; that does me good". If you offer her something bad, she immediately  
says,

says, as you would yourself, " This does not please me; this is not good for me ". In a Word, suppose yourself to be in the several Circumstances of one who cannot express any thing but his Wants, and you will find in your own Discourse the Interpretation of what a Magpy says in those Circumstances: " There is nothing more to be had here. Let us go to some other Place. Where are you o' going Mate? I am going; follow me. Come quick, come in haste. Where are you? Here I am. Don't you hear me? You eat all. I shall beat you. Aye aye, you hurt me. Who is coming there? I am afraid. Have a care, have a care. Alarm, alarm! Let us hide ourselves. Let us fly away ". You see I could swell this Dictionary with many the like Phrases, especially if I should add to it all the Expressions suggested by Love, Jealousy, Grief, and Joy. But is it not a great deal, that I have dared to give you a Specimen of it?

Now I mention Joy; give me leave here to make a short Digression. Do you know that our ancient Philosophers pretended that Beasts do not laugh, and that laughing is an essential Property of Man, exclusive of Brutes? But is not this again an ancient Mistake, and is it not evident that Beasts laugh very heartily after their own Manner, and every whit as well as Man himself? See a couple of young Puppies romping together in a Field, catching, playing Tricks, and frightening one another in jest. Can all this be done without Laughing? Is it essential to laughing, that it be done, as in Man, by a Motion of the Lips and Mouth, with a convulsive sound of Voice? Laughing is no more than an Expression of Joy, and that Expression is necessarily different in the  
different



different Species of Animals. Man laughs after his own Manner, and the Dog after his. No matter whether it is by a sudden bursting of the Voice, or by a simple Motion of the Ears or the Tail, or by some other the like Expression. It is still laughing. What Party are you going to espouse, Madam: Pray suspend your Decision a Moment. I am of the Opinion of the ancient Philosophers myself; and this for the following Reason. Laughing is an Expression of Pleasure and Joy. But all Pleasure and Joy do not excite Laughter. The only Joy which makes us laugh, is that which is accompanied with Surprise, and which is excited in us at the unexpected sight of some odd Mixture of two inconsistent Ideas or Things; as of a Magistrate dressed like a Harlequin; or of an awkward Fellow taking upon him the Man of Skill. This is so very true, that the same thing which makes us laugh in ordinary Occurrences, on some other Occasions appears no longer comical to us. We laugh at a Man, who for his Diversion or out of Vanity, trying to leap over a Ditch of Water, falls into the Middle of it. But let the same Accident happen to another running from an armed Enemy; far from laughing, we are very sorry for it; therefore, to be capable of Laughter, we must be likewise capable of comparing two Ideas together, and of perceiving the Inconsistency that is between them. Now this is what Beasts can never do, because they have none but direct Notions. They have Sentiments of Satisfaction, Pleasure and Joy; and the major Part express them very distinctly; but they cannot have the Joy which proceeds from Reflection or Comparison. Therefore Beasts never laugh, and the ancient Philosophers were in the right. Now again to our Birds.

It may be objected that Birds always repeat the same thing, and consequently vary not their Phrases as I pretend they do. To this I answer, that besides the Differences of quickness and slowness, of high and low, of length and shortness, which it is easy to observe in the Language of Beasts, there are very likely many others which we do not perceive, for want of understanding their Language, but which Birds among themselves perceive very well. Can we distinguish their Physiognomy? We hardly suspect that there is a Difference of Physiognomy among them. Nothing however is more certain, and they never mistake it. I have seen a Swallow carrying Food to six or seven little ones ranged in a Row upon the Hand of a Dial. They changed their Places every Moment, and yet the Mother never mistook in giving twice together Food to the same, but remembered every one of them. Let a Ewe in a Flock of a hundred Lambs hear her own bleat, she immediately knows him again, and hastens to him. Two Sparrows will know one another by their Voice among a thousand. I might here alledge a hundred other like Facts, to prove that all Animals have, in their mutual Correspondence, a Delicacy of Discernment, which is not within our reach, and which makes them observe Differences among themselves which are altogether imperceptible to us. If then many Birds seem to us always to sing the same Note, as the Sparrow, the Chaffinch, and the Canary-Bird; we must not thence conclude that they are saying the same thing for ever. Let us rather believe that it is occasioned by the grossness of our Organs of hearing, with regard to a Language which is quite strange and unknown to us. When we say in French *Chassez ce Matin*, & *Je Suis arrivé ce*  
Matin.

*Matin*: We distinguish these two *Matins* by the Pronunciation; but their Difference is so very insensible to a Foreigner, that he can hardly perceive it. The *Chinese* Language is full of Differences of this Kind, which Foreigners are at the greatest Loss to perceive or execute. I fancy that a Man born deaf, who should for the first time hear People converse, would (not knowing any thing of Vowels, Words, and Syllables) also believe that they repeat the same thing over and over. Such is the Judgment we pass upon the Language of Birds.

However, I shall not over-do this Reflection, and pretend that a Nightingale in the Spring varies his Discourse as much as he does his Notes; or that a Canary-bird in his Cage utters so many different Phrases as he repeats his Tune over. No, I am on the contrary persuaded that Birds are Chatterers, and love Repetitions. It is even necessary they should be so; and the Reason is this. To say, *I love you*, we have a hundred synonymous Phrases and different Expressions; and there is no Thought but what we can dress many different Ways. This is the Result of the superiority of our Knowledge, and of the Multiplicity of our Ideas, and, as I may say, of the Pliancy and Extent of our Genius, which comprehends several objects at once, and perceives their reciprocal Relations. It is not thus with Beasts. Nature has confined their Knowledge within Bounds so very narrow, that they can consider but one single Object at the same time; and as they always consider it Simply and in the same Manner; they likewise have generally but one way of expressing their Knowledge and Sentiments. This Observation is of Importance to know the Language of Beasts in a more perfect Manner. It



is not only confined, as I said, to the Objects belonging to their Preservation, but also limited in its own Nature, having commonly but one Expression for each Object; and this is the Cause of their frequent Repetitions. For as it is natural for Beasts always to insist upon the same Object till their Desire is fulfilled, or diverted by another more pressing, and as they have but one Way to explain themselves upon each Object; it is necessary that they should always repeat the same Expression, and that this Repetition should last as long as they are taken up with the same Thing. Thus a Dog barking in the Night on Account of some Noise he has heard, evidently repeats this Phrase over and over, "Have a care! I hear a Noise which give me Uneasiness: Or, I see some body I mistrust"; and he will not cease repeating it till his Apprehensions are over. Thus a Chaffinch for ever repeats to his Mate the same Expression of his Love and Tenderness, and will tell her the same Phrase twenty times over, "I love you, I love you", or something equivalent. But in other Circumstances, as for Instance, those of Anger and Jealousy, of Satisfaction and Grief, we see that both Dog and Chaffinch use many other different Phrases; or if we do not perceive the Differences of them, it is merely the fault of our Organs, or the little Knowledge we have of their several Accents.

It is then true with regard to Birds whom we have taken for our Example, that most of them are great Repeaters. Nay, it is not enough to say *most of them*, for they are all in the same Case, and if the Nightingale seems to use fewer Repetitions, it is only because his Phrase is longer and the Difference of his Notes more perceptible. But it is nevertheless true that they have different Phrases,  
for

for the different Sentiments they have a Mind to express; and that this Repetition proceeds only from their insisting long upon the same Object on one hand, and from their having but one Expression for each Object on the other. Is this a Fault in their Language? I don't deny it. But again, compare if you please this pretended Fault with the pretended Advantage of our Amplifications, Metaphors, Hyberboles, and intricate Phrases, and you will ever find in Birds Simplicity and Truth, and in the human Language abundance of idle Words and rank Falsities.

At least you cannot refuse the Simplicity of their Language an Advantage which ours has not. For it is uniform, and with regard to each Species, at all Times and in all the Countries in the World, for ever the same: Whereas in the human Kind not only each Nation has its peculiar Language, but the Dialect of every People varies perpetually, and after a certain Time it is no longer what it was. A *Frenchman* of *Charlemaign's* Time would no more understand us than we now understand a *Spaniard* or an *Englishman*. The Language of Beasts and Birds is not subject to these troublesome Variations. The Nightingales and Canary-Birds that now are, speak exactly the same Language as their Species spoke before the Flood. Carry them to the *Indies* and *China*, they will not hear a foreign Language there; and the very Moment of their Arrival they will be able to converse with their like without the Assistance of Interpreters. Is it not to be wished that Men, as was sometimes proposed, would upon this Model establish a general Language, that might be understood all over the Universe.

Ob-

Observe, Madam, that this Simplicity or Sterility in the Language of Beasts, will appear still less defective to you, if you consider that its Imperfection is replaced by Miens, Gestures, and Motions, which are a kind of Language very intelligible, and a Supplement of the Vocal Expression. A Dog for Instance, has no vocal Expression to ask Pardon when he finds you are angry with him; but what does he do? Why he humbles himself before you; he cringes at your Feet in the Posture of a Supplicant. He has no Phrase to say open me the Door; but he scratches at it, and thereby informs you of his wanting to come in or go out. Are not these speaking Actions? Even so; since they make themselves well understood. This would be the Place, as the vulgar Proverb says, to make a Commentary upon the Grimaces of Monkeys. For it is beyond all Question, that if among these Grimaces there are some which are no more than meer Contortions, there are on the other Hand some which are so many Expressions fully equivalent to Words and Phrases.

But do I not take too much Advantage, by thus alledging on the one Hand the Example of Birds which are really great Talkers, and on the other Hand that of Dogs and Monkeys which are full of Gesticulation, while there are besides these so many other Species of Beasts, which have very few or even no vocal Expressions at all, and in which we moreover observe none of the above Gestures or speaking Actions? No; I intended not to dissemble any thing. If I have proposed these Examples, it is meerly because those Beasts living amongst us, we know them much better than the other Species, and because we must always argue from the most sensible Examples,  
in



in order to illustrate Facts that are less notorious. But what if I have alledged the Instance of Cats and Dogs? Nature is constantly uniform. This is an unquestionable Principle; and consequently what essential Parts we observe in one single Species of Beasts, we are to suppose the same in all the rest.

I own Fishes and Reptiles here oppose no small Difficulty to our Prejudices. How is it to be conceived, that a Carp is not indeed the dumb Creature it is commonly thought to be, and what kind of Language can be imagined between two Palmer-worms or two Ants? The Birds sing, the Dogs bark, the Wolves howl, the Stags bellow, the Horses neigh, the Sheep bleat. But Fishes and crawling Insects appear absolutely dumb.

'Tis true, if there are a few Species of Beasts whose Language is more sensible than that of the rest, and upon which I may have ventured to form some probable Conjectures, it would be requiring too much of me to pretend that I should explain the Language of Fishes and Reptiles in the same Manner. For they may very well be proved to have a Language, be it what it will, since all the other Species are indowed with one. But who will attempt to know and distinguish it? Part of them live in an Element forbidden us, and the others escape our Sight by their Smallness.

Let us, however, with great Care avoid giving ourselves up too much to our own Prejudices. How do we know that Fishes have not as many and perhaps more vocal Expressions than the Birds themselves? They all of them seem to have been formed nearly upon the same Model. Some fly, others swim; but flying and swimming is one and the same Thing; the Element alone is different. It is written in *Genesis*, that God  
created

created at the same Time the Birds and Fishes from the Bosom of the Waters: Which served some Monks as a Pretence to persuade themselves that on Fish-Days they might indifferently eat of both Kinds. Fishes are provided with five Senses, which we observe in Birds and in all other Animals. Why should not they have the Faculty of speaking like the rest? If we hear them neither speak nor sing, it is perhaps for want of a proper Organ to hear them. The Waters is full and thoroughly penetrated with Air which Fishes breathe. Why might they not with that Air and by means of a Spring equivalent to the Tongue and Throat, form Vibrations and Sound too nice indeed for our Ears, but which might be heard in every Species? Pray observe that the Ear of Man is extremely coarse, and that this Coarseness is the Result of a necessary Providence. For were our Ear sensible to the minutest Vibrations of the Air we live in, we should be forever stunned with a thousand confus'd Noises, which would never permit us to distinguished any one of them. There are then certainly in the Air many Sounds which we do not hear. Such is the Noise of a Silk-worm that gnaws a Mulberry-Leaf. If he is alone, or if there are but few of them together, no body can hear them; but put a certain Number of them in a Cabinet, and then all these little Noises joined in Unison become mighty sensible to our Ears. How much more is it possible that there be in the Water Noises insensible to us, and that Fishes by that Means speak without being audible to us. At least I delight in thinking so, not to rob any Production in Nature of the Perfection which she is used to give to all. Nor could I think without a kind of Philosophical Melancholy, that she had

had doomed to an eternal Silence innumerable Nations, which inhabit the Immensity of the Seas and Rivers. Silence is the Portion of the Dead. Speaking inlivenis the Living themselves. You may laugh at this modern Notion as much as you please, and jest upon my speaking Fish, as doubtless he was laugh'd at who first mentioned the Flying-fish; but take Care that the one be not as true as the other, and that there be not more Prejudice than Reason in your Jokes. For my Part, I find this Opinion agreeable to Reason and Probability; and it is a sufficient Motive to me to espouse it, till I am undeceived by stronger Arguments.

The Reptiles and Insects are just in the same Case. There are many Kinds of Reptiles, which have very distinct vocal Expressions; such as Serpents, Frogs, and Toads; and consequently, arguing upon the Principle of the Uniformity of Nature, we are intitled to suppose an equivalent in the Rest; not to mention supplemental Miens, Gestures, and Looks. It is not quite so with the Insects. There is no Species of them having, that we know of, vocal Expression properly so called. For we know that the Cry of the Cricket, the Singing of the Grass-hopper, the Noise of certain Butterflies, and the Humming of the Flies, is not what we call a vocal Sound, and that it is a Noise caused by the Trembling of a Membrane. But what of that? It cannot be doubted but that the Cry of the Cricket and Grass-hopper serves them to call each other in order to meet, and very likely to converse. It may be thought that the Humming of the Flies likewise serves them to know each other in every Society, either by the Uniformity and Unison of the Tone, or by imperceptible Differences not within our Reach.



which is equivalent to vocal Expression, and is at the same time a Proof how Nature, always uniform as to what is general and essential, is at the same time ingenious in varying the Means and Particulars of her own Productions. Now, what Nature has done for some Insects, she certainly has done for all.

There is for instance a Kind of Spiders which have a very singular Method of testifying to each other their Desire of being together. 'Tis true, I was only an Ear-Witness of this; but I have been well assured that they were Spiders which made the Noise I am going to mention. A Spider who wants Company, strikes, with I know not what Instrument, against the Wall or Wood where she has settled, nine or ten gentle Blows, nearly like the Vibrations of a Watch, but a little louder and quicker, after which she stays for an Answer. If she hears none, she repeats the same by Intervals for about an Hour or two, resuming this Exercise and resting alternately Night and Day. After two or three Days, if she hears nothing, she changes her Habitation, till she finds one that answers her. It is another Spider which answers her exactly in the same Manner, and as it were by Echo. If the Latter likes the Proposal, the Conversation grows brisker, and the Beating becomes more frequent. Give Attention to it, and you will find by the Noise that they gradually approach each other, and that the Beatings come at last so close that they are confounded, after which you hear no more Noise. Very likely the rest of the Conversation is whispered. I have sometimes amused myself in making the Echo of a Spider which I heard beating, and whose Noise I imitated. She answered me punctually. She even sometimes attacked me, and

and began the Conversation, and I have oftentimes given that Diversion to several People, whom I told it was a familiar Spirit.

How many like Discoveries might we make upon Insects, if our Organs were delicate enough to see and perceive their Mien and Motions, and to hear their Voices, or what serves them instead of Voices! I am indeed persuaded, that we should find in the Ants, Worms, Scarabeus's, Caterpillers, Palmer-worms, Mites, and in all the Insects, Language designed for their Preservation and the Supply of their Wants. And as there are certain Species of Insects in which we observe greater Industry and Knowledge than in large Animals, it is probable that these Species have likewise a more perfect Language in proportion, always confined however to the Necessaries of Life.

I have seen some carrying their Conjectures much farther, and pretending that before Man finned Beasts spoke very distinctly among themselves, and pronounced a Language which Man perfectly understood, as they likewise understood the Language of a Man. He supported this Conjecture upon the Conversation which the Serpent had with Eve in Eden. If Beasts at that time, says he, had had no other Language but what they have at present, what must have been Eve's Amazement to hear a Serpent engaging in Conversation, and arguing coherently with her. Let us judge of this from the Amazement of *Bartram* when he heard his Ass speak. Struck with this Wonder, he acknowledged his Crime, and obeyed God's Command. Again, let us judge of this from the Effect which a like Event would have on us. If we should all on a sudden see a Dog sit over against us, and come out with a rational and coherent Discourse, in order to engage

us to commit some Crime, or even to persuade us to something in itself indifferent, what wou'd our surprize be! Our Hair would stand an End: We should think we saw the Devil; and far from suffering ourselves to be prevailed upon, we would reject such Counsels with Horror, at least we should mistrust them, and in all haste go and consult with some-body. Nevertheless, Eve did nothing of all this. Eve, who was so virtuous and clear-sighted, quickly listened to the artful Discourse of the Serpent, disputed with him, and at last suffered herself to be seduced. The Serpent, concluded this Person, and all the other Beasts must needs then have spoken as Men do, and their not speaking now in the same Manner, must needs be a Punishment inflicted upon them by God, for having served as an Organ to the Devil, and contributed to the Sin of Man.

This Fancy made me laugh, and if it diverts you I have a good Mind to let you adopt it, and the more so because *Plato*, in his *Politicks*, had of Beasts an Opinion much like this; because *Josephus* in his *Antiquities* was of the same Mind, and (what is of much greater Weight) because *St. Basil* expressly says in his *Homily* concerning the earthly Paradise, of which he makes a very fine Description, that it was peopled with Beasts, *which understood each other, and spoke rationally*. These are his very Words as far as I can remember; for I have not here a *St. Basil* by me. But you would accuse me perhaps of a Design to seduce you as the Serpent did Eve, if I should neglect to tell you what is to be thought of this Opinion. It is but a frivolous Conjecture without any other Foundation except the security of Eve arguing with the Serpent. Now this Foundation is altogether ruinous. For Eve before her Sin knew not what

Fear



Fear or Distrust were. She undoubtedly saw that the Serpent was no more than the Organ of some superior Power. This even raised her Curiosity, and the more because, being born immortal and free from Pain, she knew very well that she had nothing to fear; and her Curiosity still increasing her Rashness, she made the fatal Trial of her own Frailty. You see that nothing but Truth will do with me. Give me leave however to take advantage of the abovementioned Text of St. *Basil*, to support my Opinion concerning the Language of Beasts. For if they understood each other and spoke rationally in the terrestrial Paradise, that is with Knowledge, to the purpose, and agreeably to their Wants, why should they have lost this Prerogative?

It is time for me to put an End to this small Piece. I am ready to return to *Paris*, and I intend that it shall go thither before me; that you may have time enough to reflect on it, and acquaint me with your Opinion of it at my return. But shall I then conclude without giving you a particular Dictionary of the Language of Beasts? That must be: For you are sensible that the thing is impossible. There would be as many different Dictionaries as there are different Species of Beasts. 'Tis true each Dictionary would be very short, but their Number would be infinite. To give you that of the feathered Kind I must be able to distinguish and prick down the Quarters and half Quarters of the Tones which their Language is composed of. I should be able to listen to all they say in very different Occurrences, and they are so very sprightly and wild a Nation, that it is impossible to follow them.

The Canary-bird is the most familiar. Therefore you will be able with a little Attention to find

find out the Meaning of most of his Phrases. When he finds that his Mate neglects to sit on her Eggs, and is too long absent from her Nest, listen to what he says, he will for certain tell her that Moment that he is uneasy, that she must hasten to her Brood, and that he will beat her if she does not take to her Nest immediately. When the Hen obliged to keep her young warm under her has not Time to go abroad, and the Cock drops some Food out of his Beak into hers, she testifies her Satisfaction to him by the clapping of Wings, and by a little Cry different from all the others, which must necessarily signify, "I am very glad: You do me Pleasure." There are among others two Circumstances, in which the Canary-birds, as well as the Nightingale, the Chaffinch, the Linnet, and all Birds speak, or if you will, sing more than ordinary. I mean when he calls and is courting a Female, and when she is sitting on her Eggs or on her Brood. Though his Phrase in both these Circumstances seems to be the same, it may be observed however, that besides the Differences which we do not perceive, his singing in the first Case is more lively, more brisk, and attended with greater Fire. And what can it signify then, if not this, "Come dear charming Female, who lookest for a Husband; I shall marry thee; we shall have a Household in common?" In the second Case, the Canary-bird and the Nightingale say quite other Things. The Necessity of removing the Fears of their Females, which are too busy to mind much their own Security, is what makes them sing on this Occasion. The Husband watches for his Mate peached on a neighbouring Branch, whence he observes all what passes, to inform her of it in case any Cause of Apprehension

sion should appear. If he should cease singing but a Moment, the uneasy Female would quit her Nest. She remains quietly there so long as he is singing; but it would be a Prejudice void of Probability to believe, that the Nightingale sings merely for singing's sake, since Birds have no Notion of singing, or any Sense of Harmony. But though we should be under the Necessity of believing that he sings, yet should we still suppose that he sings Words, I mean that his Song signifies something. And really, what can he intend to do then, if not to say to his Wife, "Be easy, "I watch for you; you have nothing to fear; "I shall give you Warning if any Thing happens amiss." This is what Birds say and repeat all Day long on the like Occasion. The Sparrow, more Laconick in his Style, says it in a very short Phrase, but which he is forever repeating. The Phrase of the Chaffinch is something longer; that of the Canary-bird is longer still; that of the Linnet is longer yet; and at last that of the Nightingale is the longest of all. For I look upon the whole Sequel of his singing as a single Phrase, which says no more than that of the Sparrow. Such is also the Discourse of two Rival Cats mewling a Dialogue upon the Top of a House. It is only a long Phrase repeated, which expresses their Wrath and Jealousy. Wherefore it is always followed by a Battle in Form, and by the Defeat of one of the two, so that one might compare them to the Heroes of *Homer*, who never failed to make long Speeches to each other before they came to Handy-cuffs.

I have insensibly made here a little Dictionary, which may, if you will, Madam, serve as a Key to explain as nearly as you can the Language of all Beasts. Will you again have another very plain



plain Method? This is it. The whole Language of Beasts amounts to expressing the Sentiment of their Passions, and all their Passions may be reduced to a very small Number, *viz.* Pleasure, Pain, Anger, Fear, Love, the Desire of eating, the Care of their Young. If then you intend to have the Dictionary of the Language of Beasts, observe them in the Circumstances of these different Passions, and as they commonly have but one Expression for each, you will soon compose your Dictionaries from the Model I have given you. Which done, you will of all these Dictionaries together compose a Polyglot which will contain all the different Languages of Beasts. For Instance, this Phrase, "I feel Pain;" you will render it at once in the Language of the Dog, the Cat, the Hog, the Magpy, the Black-bird, &c. The whole correctly pricked down in Sharps and Flats, and I give you my Word that this will produce a mighty comical Reading.

You see I am upon the merry Pin. And why not? But what will you say of my Sincerity? I shall here make you a Confession, that will reduce the whole Language to almost nothing. I mean that you must absolutely retrench from it whatever is called Phrase or grammatical Construction, not excepting the most Contracted. Would you for instance believe, that the most eloquent Nightingale cannot say in his Language, *I love, I am very glad, I feel Pleasure.* This however is perfectly true. Any Phrase into which there enters what you call Grammatically first, second, and third Person, *I, you, he, ye,* and any other the like Pronoun, together with what you call Nouns Collective, Relative, Comparative, &c. are all of them to be blotted out of the Dictionary of Beasts. The Reason of this is quite plain: For all

all these Words express arbitrary and metaphysical Ideas, which Beasts can by no means have. They have none but direct Notions, absolutely confined to the present and material Object that strikes their Senses. Man, who is infinitely superior both in his Language and Ideas, cannot express his Mind without composing his Discourse of relative and personal Terms, that determine the Sense and Application of it. Even those who speak a Language worse, as a German who speaks broken English will tell you: *Me suffer Fever: You love the Wine.* In Beasts the Expression is still much inferior to this Jargon; and if I have represented their Discourses by Phrases composed after our own manner, it is because I could not render them otherwise: For in good Truth, Beasts in a Manner cannot express any thing more than the Name of the Passions they feel. They can have no other Expressions than those which correspond to the following, *viz.* Pain, Pleasure, Fear, Anger, &c.

I am sorry things are not more to the Honour of Beasts; but an Author must be just, and I never intended to ascribe any thing to them but what Nature thought proper to give them. You are not to think however, that all is lost. For to take things rightly, is it of any consequence that Beasts should pronounce a Phrase with distinction of Persons, composed after our own Manner, provided they be as well understood? Your Bitch, 'tis true, cannot say to you, *I love you*; but what she says in reality signifies that she does love you, and you understand her very well. What would she have and what can you desire more? Does it not come to the very same thing? Doubtless it does. Therefore, be not disheartened, Madam, and if you have any spare time, you are at Liberty to make no

account of the cavilling Distinction I have been  
 just proposing, and accordingly to go seriously  
 about making of your Dictionaries. How will  
 you be charmed, when you are once arrived to  
 the Point of being able to converse with the Birds,  
 and of understanding all their domestick Secrets!  
 You will no longer be seen any where but in  
 Woods, and the World will perhaps accuse me  
 of having deprived them of your agreeable  
 Company.

I am, &c.

F I N I S





